

## VOWEL CASCADES, VOWEL MOVEMENTS AND DI-ODES

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In the February 1998 Word Ways, Richard Lederer used the term “vowel movements” to describe those rather musical sets of five words identical but for one letter which runs the gamut of the vowels. These were first introduced to Word Ways by Dmitri Borgmann in August 1968, who cited **last lest list lost lust** and asked readers to find a word set allowing the letter Y to be included as well. This was accomplished by Darryl Francis in August 1975 with **math meth mith moth muth myth**, to which several readers added other examples such as **Dane dene dine done dune dyne** and **pale pele pile pole pule pyle**. In the August 1989 Word Ways, Ira Brilliant reopened the question, asking for the longest possible five-vowel examples. He offered **blander blender blinder blonder blunder** and **patting petting pitting potting putting**, plus longer examples using obscure or archaic words; Jeff Grant trumped him with **blathering blethering blithering blothering bluthering** and **slathering slethering slithering slothering sluthering**. John Foster offered additional examples, none as long as Jeff Grant’s, in February 1994.

The shortest vowel movements other than **a e i o u** itself are **an en in on un** and **ma me mi mo mu my**, a sixer. Other bigrams make good vowel movements if we allow proper names and one-word abbreviations like the chemical elements. By “good” I mean that all the words are in or implied by a dictionary such as the 1966 Random House Unabridged. Brilliant’s two examples are good, as are Foster’s **bagging begging bigging bogging bugging** and **racking recking ricking rocking rucking** and several by Lederer.

This article introduces vowel cascades. These are vowel movements in which the words flow together, or have a meaningful connection, e.g. form a sequence, phrase, sentence or story. They add interest to the simple search for vowel movements, making it an exercise in free association. Can you screw your mind enough to read the following? My interpretation follows each vowel cascade. Some have more than one reading—and any others you find are also correct! 25, 26a and 27 are taken from my book, *up/dn*, which will be available soon as a Word Ways Monograph.

### A Dozen Good Vowel Cascades

- 1 **Bad bed bid bod bud** bedbug bites are ‘budding’; she misbehaved and got pregnant
- 2 **“Bag, beg, big bog bug!”** directive to swamp insect collectors, “Bag one, I beg you,” or “Bag or beg one” (add “by G!” for a cheater’s sixer)
- 3 **Bagging begging bigging bogging bugging** obtaining the building’s (N.Br. bigging’s) permission—despite pleading—is delaying its “securitisation”
- 4 **Blander blender-blinder “blonder” blunder** Nazi-type racism, blind to the benefits of blending (i.e., hybrid vigour, vital polymorphism)
- 5 **Dane: “Dene dine?” “Done! Dune”** invitation and acceptance to a European dinner date on the sand hill by the sea
- 6 **“Far fer fir?” “For fur?”** homophonic misunderstanding? or a reasoned reply, “Fir forest for fur trapping?”
- 7 **“Hack, heck!” Hick hock huck!”** rural lad who talks like Tarzan would rather be a lowly cloth salesman than a hack (or a hacker)



- 8 **Last lest list lost lust** putting the best last to maintain interest to the end
- 9 **“Mate, mete mite mote *mute!*”** “don’t brag if you’re giving out such tiny bits, buddy!”
- 10 **“Nab neb-nib. (Nob nub!)”** “grab [the bird] by the point of its beak—that’s the knob on its head!”
- 11 **“Pap pep-pip Pop, pup!”** diner’s whinge: “This ‘baby food’ will dampen the vigour of dad and dog alike!”
- 12 **“Sans sens sins, son’s suns!”** “free of greed, an honest son outshines many suns” (Asian proverb?)

### A Dozen Inferior Vowel Cascades

Vowel cascades are far easier to find if we allow non-Random House and nonce words, dialect contractions (e.g. *lyin’* in 14, *‘pon* in 18), and especially phonetic vowel movements as in Richard Lederer’s opener **flay flea fly flow flue** and in all but 16 and 18). They are of less logological interest but offer more latitude for entertainment.

- 13 **Fair fear fire for Fuhrer** Nazi youths having Christian doubts about Hitler’s ultimate fate?
- 14 **“Lyin’ loon” loan line lean-lain** in the bank’s loony “line”, *lyin’* is only thinly disguised [an uphill cascade sixer]
- 15 **Nayed need nide. Noed, nude or Nude, node/nide need nayed** Indian sadhus (indigent itinerant holy men) deny the need for rest, home place or clothes
- 16 **“Packer”-pecker picker pocker pucker** too rude to translate, but it involves getting pockmarks from an oral activity
- 17 **Paid, peed, pooed** a pay toilet, what else? (a really kinky brothel?)
- 18 **pan: Pen, pin ‘pon pun** definition of “to pan” by a sarcastic critic: “kill with a pun” (or ‘imprison’, contain)
- 19 **Review’ll re-vowel. (Reville?) Reveal! (Re-veil!!)** an involuted vowel movement’s efforts to define itself and fend off criticism [another salmon-like uphill struggle]
- 20 **“Sane scene sign sown soon”** “this insane world,” we keep hearing, “is about to wise up”
- 21 **“Santa sent a cent, a Son ‘ta Sun’, ta!”** XXMas (modern child’s “true meaning” of Christmas) / *ta Sun* = to Light (the tree?)” [a charaded vowel movement]
- 22 **Shay. She, shy. Show. Shoe** the Cinderella story
- 23 **Skates, Keats, kits, coat, scoot** as a day out with the literary gang ends all too soon, you grab your coat and run [another charaded vowel movement]
- 24 **“Tater. Teeter tighter, totter, tooter”** cheering on a vodka binger

### Palindromic Double Vowel Movement Cascades

More rare, double vowel movement palindromes (word, letter, or phonetic as in 15 above) are also cascades if the whole has meaning, new or restated. Here I mix good and inferior ones.

- 25a **“Bud bod, bid bed ‘bad’!” (Bad bed bid bod bud)** his ‘budding’ body and her friendly (‘buddy’) body had some “bad” fun and caused her body to bud with child (or sores?)
- 25b **“Bad bed bid bod bud? Dub-dob-dib-deb dab?”** are you tattling on the debutante’s positive pregnancy test?
- 26a **“Mad med mid mod mud: Dum do, MD! I’m dem dam!”** yet another (im)patient loses faith in the Priests of Progress [a charaded vowel movement]
- 26b **(Dum Dom dim dem dam mad med mid mod mud)** here the crazy mixed-up doctors are further impaired by posh champagne
- 27 **Mass mess miss moss muss. “Muss’ moss, miss mess, mass!”** the hectic masses



of the concrete jungle miss out on nature's green 'muss'—"get green (knees and elbows), masses, drop out of the mad mod mess! Give it a miss!"

- 28 **"Nut, not nit, net Nat."** "Nat net nit, not nut. Nut not, nit, net Nat" "Nats (Burmese nature spirits) are worshipped by nuts without a nit of illumination," says the cynic, but the Naturan replies "a nat sees over nits and gnats and all living things, with no interest in crackpot spirit-dead nutters; trust the nat, gnat, don't natter nattily"
- 29a **Pat pet-pit pot-put (put pot pit, pet pat)** the doghouse—or pet snake pit!—is a safe spot for storing one's stash (procedure: put the stash into the pit then pat the pet to guard it for you)
- 29b **Patted (petted), pitted, potted, putted-putted, potted, pitted, petted (patted)** later on, pat the pet, re-enter the pit, get stoned and go play miniature golf—then reverse
- 30a **Sax sechs (six) socks "sucks"** the saxophone sextet wows or socks it to their sycophantic fans [a phonetic vowel movement charade palindrome]
- 30b **(Sacks sex? Sick! 'S socks-sucks!)** a hard-of-hearing reply, suggesting that celibacy is like sucking socks
- 30c **(Sucks socks? Sick's sex-sacks?)** another hard-of-hearing reply

## Di-odes

Despite my efforts to avoid it, some of the above vowel movements mixed long and short vowels. Here the whole point is to mix, to pair homographic heterophones (same spelling pronounced differently) that differ by a shift from (loosely) short to long vowel, or vice versa. In *up/dn* I called them vowel movement charades, as they 'move' without changing letters. I also call them di-odes, or two-word micropoems. As poetry a di-ode is definitely an **Od Od** (odd ode): **Sonet so net?** (sonnet so neat?) **Vers vers!** (verse veers!)

The long vowel words are in italics. Spellings are phonetic so all are orthographic 'charades'. Puzzling at first, they're quite easy once you catch the rhythm and learn to read them like headlines. As above, some have more than one reading. The following is a sampling of di-odes, all from *up/dn*, mostly exploring three-letter pairs. Can you find longer ones?

- 31 **Am am** I am my aim (defined by my aim, or achieved it, or am self-centered)
- 32 **Bum bum bun bun** bum boom bun boon (a breadline during skyrocketing unemployment, or TV's "Babewatch", or a loud fart, relief or humour being the boon)
- 33 **Rex rex fox fox , pup pup** Rex reeks of foxhunters and (corgi?) puppy poop
- 34 **Bir bir buz buz bid bid** ("Sin sin? Mir mir, just just!") beer buyer's booze buzz bid him to bide (a sign of sin? No, I'm merely mired, just juiced!)
- 35 **'Mit mit' war-war sez "Sez!" Ded-ded-fit fit was was.** (Ful ful sik sik gun gun did, did. Dum dum!) 'Mitt might' war wayer [or weigher or ware] says "Seize! Dead-deed-fit fight was ways." (Full-fool sick-psych gun goon did, died. Dumb doom!)